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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1694

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES IMMEDIATE

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 3520

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE

RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 1445

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 0926

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000709

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, EUR/SE, DAS KAI DANOW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2019

TAGS: PREL TU AM AJ

SUBJECT: BAKU DISAVOWS REPORTS OF ANTI-TURKEY RESPONSE

REF: A. BAKU 690

1B. BAKU 697

Classified By: Charge Donald Lu, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Azerbaijan's public response to the latest revelations about the Turkey-Armenia process has differed markedly from March and April 2009 (reftels). By contrast, this time the GOAJ has taken pains to emphasize their closeness to the Turks, and even took the extraordinary step of openly and angrily rejecting claims by a Russian news service that it was planning to subvert the political process in Turkey and apply pressure to Turkish business interests in Azerbaijan. In interviews, the Foreign Minister and the President's chief foreign policy adviser both expressed confidence that Turkey would not open the border unless the Karabakh issue had been solved, citing Erdogan's 13 May speech in Baku and statements of FM Davutoglu. We noted in Reftel B that Turkey's improved diplomacy with Baku, including phone calls from Erdogan to Aliyev and Davutoglu to Mammadyarov and the visit of one of Davutoglu's top deputies, was paying off in terms of preempting attempts to ruin the delicate process with Armenia. Azerbaijani officials' linking the physical opening of the border (not necessarily the other aspects of the normalization process) to progress on Karabakh is not surprising. It is not fully clear whether their declarations at this point simply reflect a belief that Erdogan is bound politically by his May 13 speech, or if the Turks gave them specific guarantees before the August 31 announcement. End Summary.

12. (C) A telling demonstration of the lengths to which Baku is going to distance itself from the kind of rhetoric it employed in the spring was the biting response that a senior official of the Presidential Administration, Elnur Aslanov, delivered to the Russian news agency Regnum. Regnum posted an article to its website on September 1 detailing an alleged emergency meeting at the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration at which Aliyev and his ministers of foreign affairs and national security plotted to undermine Turkish-Armenian rapprochement by, among other things, covert action to support the political opposition in Turkey and by starting crippling tax inspections of Turkish-owned businesses in Azerbaijan, starting with small and medium enterprises and moving up the food chain as the Ankara-Yerevan dialogue intensified.

13. (U) In a statement published by the Azerbaijani news agency Trend, Aslanov denied the fact of the meeting and

demanded a retraction and apology for the "false, unproven and biased information." The statement, referencing another article, also accused Regnum of "pranks" designed to ruin relations between Azerbaijan and Russia. His "correction" to the Regnum story was repeated and amplified by presidential foreign affairs adviser Novruz Mammadov in a TV interview September 3.

¶4. (C) Also interesting were additional statements by Foreign Minister Mammadyarov and Novruz Mammadov, the former after a telephone call with Turkish FM Davutoglu, the latter in a lengthy news interview. Quoted by Azerbaijani First News, Mammadyarov stated, "We believe that the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Turkey will keep their word, given to the Azerbaijani people, that without the liberation of the occupied territories, the border will not be open." (Note: The same Azerbaijani report reproduced a Davutoglu quote in Hurriyet following the same conversation that "Azerbaijan can completely depend on Turkey." End Note.)

¶5. (C) Mammadov, speaking to Baku's Turan news agency, also opined that Turkey would not abandon Azerbaijan, referring to Erdogan's damage-controlling speech to the Azerbaijani parliament May 13. However, he also voiced the expectation that "serious progress" could be made on Karabakh as the Turkey-Armenia process goes forward since the Turkish parliament would require it in order to ratify the protocols.

He underlined that opening the border without resolution of the Karabakh conflict would be "unacceptable to Baku."

¶6. (C) Comment: The reaction thus far of senior Azerbaijani

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officials to the August 31 announcement of renewed efforts to move forward the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement process have been cautious and low-key. This is particularly true in comparison to Baku's reaction to the initial announcement of the process in spring. At that point, Azerbaijani officials reacted with shock and dismay, claiming to be utterly surprised to learn of the talks from the Swiss mediator. Turkey clearly stepped up its diplomatic efforts this time around. The question remains, however, what was said or promised to whom and when.

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